

SECOND PLACE WINNER

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8th Grade

12 years old

"No work is insignificant. All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence"

I think that Martin Luther King rightly stated that all work is important and has dignity, and that we should all work hard no matter what job we have, or what other people say. Many people around the world are treated badly and given terrible work conditions. In spite of this, their work still has dignity even though it is not rewarded.

I was born on the African continent. Although 'work is work' wherever we live, it causes people to risk their lives for better living conditions. Every year thousands of people in Africa try and cross over the Mediterranean Sea under extremely dangerous conditions, to Europe, risking their lives just to find a job that most people would not desire to do. These jobs include being street cleaners, cleaning bathrooms, and other menial jobs for little pay. They often work during the night so that they do not get caught since they often do not have work visas.

Dr. King worked tirelessly to ensure that all people, blacks and whites, had equal labor rights. During the civil rights era there was much segregation and blacks could not do the same jobs that whites could. For example, in the movie, "The Help", based on a real life story in Jackson, Mississippi, two maids were grossly overworked and underpaid. A determined journalist wanted to interview them about their hard lives as maids. At first they didn't want to tell her because they were afraid of being fired. After a long struggle, they told her and encouraged other maids to tell their stories as well. Eventually they quit their jobs as maids because they were weary of being mistreated.

Another quote from Dr. King: "If a man does not have a job or an income, at that moment you deprive him of life. You deprive him of liberty. And you deprive him of the pursuit of happiness." A person with no job has no sense of pride in who they are. This person will have no purpose in life. The book of Proverbs in the Bible says "... where there no vision, people perish". We were created with a vision and to work to fulfil our purpose in life.

In a different generation, with the same dream as Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela steps onto the platform. He also worked just as hard to bring equality to black people in South Africa under the apartheid regime. I lived in South Africa for 7 years and Mandela's hard work was evident. He was thrown in jail on Robben Island for 27 years, where he was treated harshly and did forced labor. He did his work to the best of his ability. Following these long grueling years he was finally freed from jail and he became the first black president of South Africa, which goes to show that no work is insignificant.

On a personal level when I first came to the United States, I was being bullied at school. In spite of that, I kept working hard and in the end it paid off. I would not let "them" stop me from achieving my goal of succeeding in school. I persistently got onto the school bus every morning and did my classes. Soon after my challenging experience, I won a number of awards throughout the school year. This demonstrated that one should work to the best of their ability no matter what they are going through.

During the reign of Idi Amin in Uganda, my grand uncle worked for the government. This was a tough time for the country because anything you did or said was closely monitored. You could be executed if you stepped out of line for any minor incident. Furthermore, my grand uncle almost got killed for doing

his job justly and truthfully. He was relentless in his efforts to ensure that the staff in his department were upright and worked honestly. He fired one of his staff who was linked to Idi Amin, and this staff member reported him. What followed was a series of events that could have led to his own death. Thankfully he is still alive to tell the story.

My father said the other day that a business owner in Africa can keep a store open until midnight and take home minute earnings. In comparison, a business owner in American can close his store at 7pm and go home with major profits. The value of their work is not the same when measured in monetary terms, but in reality it is. At the end of the day, it really has equal value.

In conclusion, God gave us work to do and it all matters and it all has dignity and should help us move forward in every area of our lives. In Dr. King's book, "A Call to Conscience", he quotes Henry George who stated that, "the fact is that work which improves the condition of mankind, the work which extends knowledge and increases power and enriches literature and elevates thought, is not done to secure a living. It is not the work of slaves driven to their tasks. It is the work of men who somehow find a form of work that brings security for its own sake and state of society where want is abolished". The issue is getting rid of poverty first, and then people will be more willing to work. I think that Martin Luther King was right when he said "no work is insignificant."

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